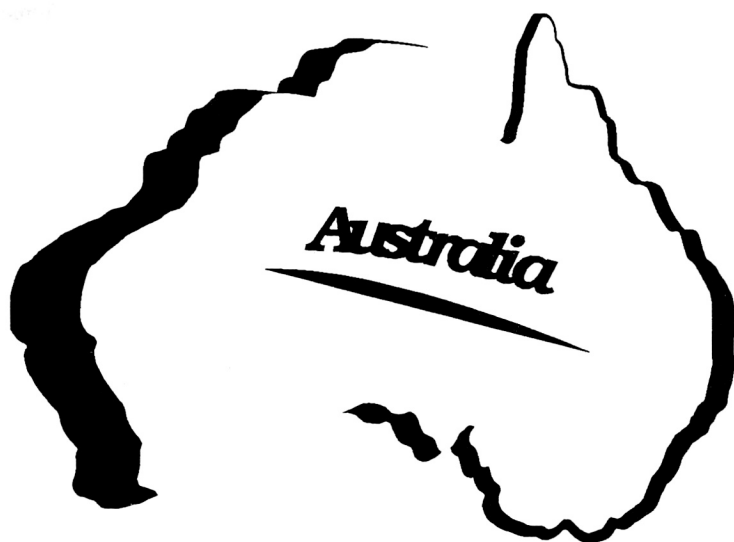


Canberra  
Amiga  
Users'  
Society  
Inc



beCAUS  
October 1992



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# Canberra Amiga Users' Society Inc

## Aims of the Society

Canberra Amiga Users Society Incorporated (CAUS) is an independent group (currently with about 250 members) formed for the benefit of people who own, use or are interested in the Commodore Amiga computer.

## Benefits

Benefits include a bi-monthly newsletter, monthly meetings, discounts, a bulletin board, Public Domain library, special interest groups (SIGs) and the opportunity to meet and exchange ideas with other Amiga users.

## Subscriptions

Membership of the Society is available for an annual fee of \$20. This fee may be paid, with a filled-in application form, either at any of the monthly meetings or by mail to the Membership Secretary, PO Box 596, Canberra 2601.

## Bulletin Board

The CAUS bulletin board is online 24 hours and is maintained by our new Sysop Stephen White. To be a member of the bulletin board, you need to pay \$5.00 additional yearly subscription. The telephone number of the bulletin board is 2531170 and of the Sysop 2532394 (h).

## Meetings

Meetings are held at 8 pm on the second Thursday of each month in either the Chifley Room or the auditorium at the Canberra Workers' Club in Childers St, Civic. The dates for the next few meetings are 8 October and 12 November 1992 and 14 January 1993.

The Beginners' Group runs from 7-8 pm prior to each meeting. Details of upcoming meetings and main topics will be advertised in the Canberra Times "Fridge Door" the week of the meeting.

## Newsletter Contributions

beCAUS is produced bi-monthly. Contributions can be submitted to the Editor via the newsletter area of the bulletin board, at the monthly meetings or to The Editor, PO Box 596, Canberra 2601.

Articles, reviews, comments and graphics are always welcome. Where possible, please provide them in Amiga readable format ie a disk file in ASCII, Wordperfect, Scribble!, Prowrite, Excellence or Amiga graphic format. The deadline for contributions to the newsletter is the 15th of the month preceding distribution. All contributions should be accompanied by the author's name and contact details. We reserve the right to refuse, disclaim and/or edit contributions.

## Copyright and Reprints

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## Advertising

	First Run	Rerun
Full page	\$40	\$30
Half page	\$30	\$20
Quarter page	\$20	\$10

Copy is to be provided to the Editor either in Amiga graphic file format or as appropriately sized printed copy. First Run prices are applicable if the Editor has to format the advertisement.

## Production

The Editor for the newsletter was David Wilson. The copy was formatted by the DTP SIG using Professional Page v3 and the masters were printed on a Postscript printer by Desktop Utilities. The offset printing was done by Tuggeranong Print.

Amiga is a registered trademark of Commodore-Amiga, Inc.

## The Cover

The maps on the cover were produced in Professional Draw and go into any of the big three desktop publishing programs. A disk of maps of Australia, New Zealand, the States and Papua New Guinea is available from Mrs Trenery on 286 1358.

### CAUS Committee (1992)

Director	Chris Townley	2545922 (h) 6-8pm
Vice Director	Gordon Owtftrim	2972692 (h) 6-8pm
Secretary	Tony Hayman	2961894 (h) 7-10pm
Membership Sec.	Berenice Jacobs	2552284 (h) 4-8pm
Treasurer	Terry Sullivan	2545922 (h)
Committee	Stephen Bourne	2350150 (h)
	Christopher Cole	2478590 (h)
	Joe McCully	2552128 (h)
	Neil Squires	2591128 (h)
	Loy Winkler	2588320 (h) 4-10pm

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## Special Interest Groups

Each of the following members is coordinating a Special Interest Group (SIG) in the listed topic. If you are interested in joining one of these groups and getting more out of your Amiga, either contact them direct or indicate your interest at the next monthly meeting:

Loy Winkler	2588320	Genealogy
Bernie Wiemers	2418739	Amos
Christopher Cole	2478590	Hardware
Matthew Taylor	2515343	Music and Graphics
David Wilson	2918324	Desktop Publishing
Rob Vander Meer	2418480	Video
Andrew Boundy	2916971	CanDo

### Music and Graphics SIG - Mathew Taylor

The SIG is still here, although not really there. Anyone with problems or info or gossip regarding Music and Graphics should let me know. I'm looking to get something going with the SIG. Something like a demo, or maybe an application program related to Music or Graphics. If anyone would like to contribute ANYTHING they have created to the SIG, or have any suggestions, they should have a chat to me at the next meeting.

At the next meeting I will have the SIG's library of PD. This library consists of 31 disks of modules, and 27 disks of graphics (G,PG,R and X rated); each disk costs \$1.50, which INCLUDES the disk.

### Genealogy SIG - Loy Winkler

Members interested in this SIG should contact me on 2588320 and I will update you on what's happening. I also need a good location for SIG meetings - can you help?

## CAUS Public Domain Collection

The Society's Fred Fish collection of public domain software contains a huge variety of goodies from text editors, databases, communication, graphic and music programs through to utilities, games, disks of pictures and animations and many demonstrations of commercial programs.

The following people are PD librarians:

Simon Tow	Fisher	2888362
Lawrence Coombs	Aranda	2515523
Berenice Jacobs	Scullin	2552284
Bernie Wiemers (AMOS)		2489837

You have the choice of buying the disks or swapping them for some new acceptable NAME brand disk that you own. The copying fee for each disk (except for the FISH catalogue disk) is \$1 to cover the librarian's costs.

For those who want other than the Fish collection, Berenice Jacobs holds a large collection of alternate public domain. Contact Berenice for more details.

# Hype or Hypermedia ?

by Stephen Bourne

In this article I will discuss concepts of "hypertext" and "hypermedia". The latter, in particular, is becoming a catch-cry in computing now that DOS machines can make sounds (with a little help from add-on cards and some sweat and tears in setting up) and show pretty pictures.

Over the next couple of issues, unless banished from the magazine due to popular demand, I will extend the article to my views on planning a hypermedia program on the Amiga, then offer some tips on extracting the most from the cheap but very effective Amiga program "Hyperbook" (by Gold Disk). The reason for these articles is to point out that in any Amiga of any vintage that you own, you have a machine that is remarkably cost-effective and sophisticated for creating this sort of program; further, you don't have to have the slightest knowledge of programming to produce and distribute your own slick electronic publications. Power to the People, even Lamers !!!

The way we have acquired most knowledge, apart from the spoken word and through observation, is via books. These are essentially linear, or "sequential", slabs of information. They have definite starting and ending points with a sequence of events or ideas strung between the two. It is a very convenient form of presenting information, and one which we take totally for granted. The problem, as anyone who has undertaken any sort of serious writing will know, is that the events or ideas don't necessarily logically follow one another. The art of this linear writing is largely how cleverly you can fuse one section into the next, in what order you arrange things, and how well you can avoid going back over old ground to explain something. In the academic world they use footnotes and endnotes to let them off the hook a bit; these allow the writer to digress without losing the thread of what is being written about.

It is not surprising then that particularly in the academic world computers

were long ago seen to offer the chance to escape the confines of sequential writing and information storage, via the concept of "hypertext". Essentially the concept is one of "nodes" of information, interconnected by logical links. If you were reading about a particular artist, for instance, and there was a reference to someone else writing about her, you could click on the other author's name, or reference, and jump straight to that work. If the artist had been interested in the Vietnam war protest movement you could jump to information on that topic.

"Hypermedia" simply extends this mobility in following threads of information into other media like pictures and sound. In a hypermedia program you would have to do no more than click on the title (or an icon) of an artwork (or bird, whale, car or whatever) to instantly view it.

It is pretty obvious, then, why Amigas - with their in-built graphics, sound, speech synthesis, multi-tasking, and memory efficiency - are ideal machines for multimedia work. Commercially the hype surrounding multimedia is inevitably linked with CD roms. Forget the hype - CD's can be useful and they are certainly on the way up as storage devices, but unless ways are developed for ordinary users to write to them they will exist in a worthwhile niche for a period of time then disappear again. Multimedia really has really nothing to do with the CD other than that it is a useful commercial storage medium. On a one megabyte floppy disk you can produce a very attractive multimedia project to run on the Amiga.

I have no doubt that the multimedia games on machines like the Amiga have opened the eyes of many to new concepts for storing, retrieving or teaching information rather than relying almost exclusively on books. Until recently the means were simply not available at an affordable cost. Now a CD costing around \$100 can be offered which contains not only the text and pictures of a whole set of encyclo-

pedias, but sounds and animations which books simply cannot include. About the only draw-back is that you need a computer to access the information. But in access the computer offers great advantages over the book - it can search for information for you, working in a random rather than a sequential fashion (in other words you can jump quickly to any picture or text rather than having to wait, such as when you put a video tape player on fast forward). In addition much of the computer data is available for use in other ways - providing copyright laws do not apply. Students should not have to tediously copy out notes - they should be able to save existing text to disk for citing in essays etc.

Well that is probably enough talking about hypermedia/hypertext concepts. It is easy enough to understand what it offers but it is harder to break old notions of expression if you wish to tackle presenting your own ideas in the newer format. If this article were prepared as hypertext it would not look much like this (I might be exaggerating a bit because it is neither long nor complicated, so it would need no fancy treatment). It would be more in the form of an introductory set of menus allowing you to move into, and then between, various streams of information.

However once you grasp the concept you realise that most information, apart from fiction and history (if there is really any difference), is not really sequential in nature at all. It is therefore crying out for hypertext/hypermedia treatment! Everything from car manuals to disclosures on the birds and the bees has been squeezed into books because, as much as anything else, there has been no alternative.

As an Amiga owner you have a head start on other computer users to leap into the brave new world of producing and publishing electronically your own fetishes - be they concerned with stamp collecting, vintage cars, a PR front for your business to display in a foyer, or whatever.

If there is some interest in the topics I will go on in the next article to talk about design strategies for multimedia work.



# Reviews, Remarks and Ravings

## Mathew Taylor.

### Moving up to a 2000 and 2.04.

I guess one of the most commonly heard questions in the Amiga world is "Should I buy an A2000, over an A500 (or now maybe that's A600)?" Well, I for one did upgrade with the purchase of a second-hand A2000, complete with 2.04 ROMs. I think I'll run through all the things that make an A2000 and 2.04 better. You can decide which of the upgrades you think is worth it.

The first thing I did was to boot up Workbench and have a look around. Upon boot up one notices that the Workbench screen can now be a window, i.e. the disk icons can appear in a window of their own, like drawers etc. The display can also revert back to the "backdrop" style of 1.3. The gadgets are changed, as is the basic look of the window. Front and Back gadgets are exchanged for one single gadget, which pops a window to front if it's behind, or vice versa. The whole thing has a nice 3D effect to it, and feels much smoother.

Next I took a look at the menus. They have had a major overhaul. You can now do things like issue a command, display last message and even quit Workbench from the "Workbench" menu. The next menu, the "Window" menu, allows one to clean up a window (which has been programmed exquisitely, and takes account of the size of the name of the file to work out the best place to put each icon. Basically, it has proportional icon spacing), and an option to create a new drawer. One major new improvement is that you can view not only the files that have icons, but you can select to view all files, and the non icon ones are given a hammer icon. If you don't like icons (or hammers) you can choose to display the files as per filename, date or size, the files appearing as a list in the window (reminiscent of a Mac!).

Other strange things began to occur while using the 2.04 system. My terminal program, JR-Comm, would now function properly. By that I mean that under 1.3 I could not access speeds past 4800 bps, and the dialler just did not function the way it should. Now everything was fine. In fact, many programs seem to have benefited from the 2.04 upgrade. Most things seem to work faster under 2.04. Windows draw up quicker and even on a stock standard 7.14 Mhz Amy, things seemed much snappier.

OK. Now we get to the actual 2000. The Amiga 2000 represents much better expandability than your base A500 (or 600). For one, the peripheral devices can be stuck inside the nice desktop case, so we don't have to spread them all over the desk. (In my case, this was very important, as my desk is VERY small). The units fit in a lot easier, and you can put more into a 2000. For those that do not know, the A 2000 has two PC/XT slots (useless without an IBM emulator, which for my money is worthless anyway), two Zorro / PC / AT slots, which can be used for Amy boards or the IBM emulator, so are useful, and three Zorro slots, which are Amy specific. It also comes with a Video slot, used to attach you guessed it, video enhancing products.

So what this means is that you can stick just about anything straight in and Bobs your uncle. Also, the cards to slot in a 2000 are cheaper than the 500 counterparts. This is due to the obvious need to add power supply and external casing to things like hard drives. For example, a reasonably recent price list quoted the A500 HD+8 (GVP) was \$875, and the A2000 HC+8 (The same thing for the 2000) was only \$750.

Of course, the final reason to buy an A2000 is that it is bigger and better (Well, bigger, at least. It in itself isn't really better, it only gets better after

you add to it!) Certainly having an external keyboard is a big plus. Having the two floppy drives slotted nicely in the front is also great for user friendliness. All in all, I would recommend buying an A2000. It is a unit that you will find much easier to deal with (Unless servicing the thing, at which point you have to pull a lot more to bits, but that's why we have techs!), and much more cost effective later on.

### Buying a Second Hand System.

As I said before, the 2000 I bought was second hand. There are pitfalls involved. For instance, when I took delivery, we ran the system to make sure it all functioned perfectly. While we tested it, it did. So I parted with my money and sat down to play with it.

As it turned out, there was a fault in it. Several actually. For one, the odd CIA had been inserted by a rank amateur, and pin 20 was horribly twisted. I fixed that, in the hope that was the cause of my major problem. The thing kept crashing. All the time. My friends and I eventually began to suspect the Neolithic (My technician friend said "Neolithic doesn't even begin to describe it") RAM board was at fault. It certainly had a vast number of dry joints.

So I took it to my tech friend (whom I happen to work for) and asked him if he would re-solder these joints. He ended up making me do it, but that wasn't a bit deal (although I didn't have much faith in my own soldering ability - glad he did.). So far this seems to have corrected the problem, although one will never be quite sure until a few weeks have passed without failure.

Fortunately for me, this has not cost me anything yet. This is the risk one takes when buying second hand. If I find that I do need work done on it, then it will just be my bad luck. Buying a second hand machine IS a good way to get something you otherwise couldn't afford, but it is wise to negotiate a cooling off period, or find a technical that will test the system fully for next to nothing before you buy it.

# PLUGS AND POINTS by Leigh Murray

## For Starters

Here's a few ad hoc points that popped up in my mind while I was finishing off the Sounds of Silence article about the GVP fan.

## A590 Owner-Drivers

For A590 hard drive owners who are driven bonkers by what I understand is a very noisy fan fitted to these units (I've never actually heard one but I know that the racket disturbs some people so much they don't use their hard drive), then the only options have been to fit a quieter fan, outfit yourself with ear-plugs, or drown out the noise with music.

In Megadisc 27, there was a cost-saving suggestion to buy an A590 without the hard drive and then fit a Quantum hard drive into that unit. This suggests to me that an alternative, nerve-soothing treatment for those A590 owners bothered by the fan noise might be to fit a Quantum drive and run it without any fan at all (and get a bigger drive while you're at it).

## A Plug for Purchasing Megadisc

Talking of Megadisc reminds me to mention that I find Megadisc a veritable mine of information, and well worth the price.

Nowadays Megadisc comes on two discs crammed full of information (oodles of articles, reviews and feedback from readers). Some of this is aimed firmly at beginners (including stuff I write - that's my level), and some reaches into the esoteric class for the techno-freaks.

Each issue of Megadisc comes bundled with a cardboard Fact Card; these contain some really useful summaries. For instance, recent Fact Cards have covered such topics (one per card) as CLI commands, Amiga-DOS disk structures, telecommunications terms, using wildcards, and operating system terminology.

A feature of Megadisc that I find very handy indeed is the detailed listing in each issue of all the latest PD available. There's some very good stuff out there in the Public Domain, but it's often a problem to find out about it. Each Megadisc issue lists the contents of the latest Fish disks (for instance, Megadisc 29 gives details of Fish disks from 661 to 700), and details all other recent additions to the Megadisc PD catalogue (AmigOz, TBAG etc). Plus the editor and readers point out interesting PD they've come across. Also, Megadisc have their PD catalogue in disk form, and it is very easy to search for specific topics of interest, using the search facilities provided by the FullView text viewer which comes on the disk. You can also get the latest version of Aquarium (which now covers up to Fish 650) for fast searching of Fish disk listings (it's on Megadisc's MISC 10 for floppy users, or a hard drive version comes on MISC 10B).

Megadisc has a big PD library and excellent service; most of their PD costs only \$3.50 a disk, or \$2.50 for subscribers. They dispatch orders very quickly so if you ring through an order, you should have the disks within a few days at most. Of course, you can buy a lot of PD easily and cheaply from the CAUS PD librarians, but Megadisc has some extra series that are well worth purchasing too.

I strongly recommend you buy Megadisc. I think it's an excellent resource for Amiga users, one that should be supported in every way possible. Single issues of Megadisc can be purchased at CAUS meetings or direct from Megadisc (for orders, ring toll-free on 008 227 418; you can buy now, pay later with Bankcard, Mastercard or Visa), and subscribers get a discounted price plus cheaper PD.

## Another Plug Points to a Good Dealer

Still on the subject of plugs, I'd like to make particular mention of Rob Wilkins of Carina Computers. I bought my GVP hard drive from him, and a lot of other stuff too, and I've found him very helpful and competitively-priced. He can be contacted on 048 442221 or 018 482845, or see him at any CAUS meeting where he usually has a tempting special or two.

When one is buying such snazzy hardware as a GVP, it is important to buy from a reputable dealer who is happy to answer queries and help if there are any problems or difficulties in setting it up. If you are a beginner, then it's even more important. Installing new hardware or software can be a trifle tricky at the best of times - not everything is perfectly documented. And once you get into the fancier (but oh, so TERRIFIC!) hardware such as hard drives, there is more potential for problems if you aren't quite sure about the technical details or how best to use these gorgeous beastsies.

Usually, you'll get much poorer service from a computer 'supermarket' than from a specialist Amiga dealer. I'm very partial to a good bargain (I'm an absolute sucker for one, to be honest), and I don't think you can get a better bargain than a helpful dealer with excellent prices. This description certainly fits Carina Computers; it may also apply to other local dealers too, although I can't speak from experience of any others.

## A Plea for More Pointers

Now a PLEA. Please try writing for CAUS - a small article, a review, or hints on how you use your Amiga. Give us a few pointers - we'll all benefit.

I think a mixture of articles, reviews, hints and feedback aimed at all different levels of Amiga-expertise makes for an interesting, entertaining and useful newsletter.

This year, I've written a number of articles for CAUS and Megadisc, and I've gained a lot from doing this because I've learnt so much in the process. Writing about something tends to focus one's mind powerfully on all the little niggly points, the things that aren't quite crystal clear in one's teeny-weensy brain; if you are trying to explain something to someone else, you've got to get it clear in your own mind first. I've been amazed at how much I've learnt this way, and relatively painlessly too.

Why not give it a go? Write a full-blown super-technical review, if that is your scene. Or maybe just a beginners hint or two, a few comments on a favourite software package, even sad tales of problems you've had. Good news and bad news.

If something is really puzzling you, perhaps you could send a question to the editor, and someone experienced could write an answer. Or write to the editor telling him what you like about CAUS and what you don't like about it, and where you think the Society could be more helpful or useful for you.

But, please, tell the rest of us what you think and know about using your wonderful Amiga. Contribute to CAUS in whatever way you can; let's help each other as much as possible to get the most out of what is a truly GREAT machine.



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### Help Service

The following is a list of members who have volunteered to share their knowledge and experience with other members. If you have a problem or just need a bit of advice in any of the areas listed, please ring during the hours shown.

what's happening general help	Paul Martin	10-10 M-Su	2532121
	Joe McCully	6-12 pm M-Su	2552128
	Gordon Owttrim	7-10 pm M-Su	2972692
	Neil Squires	7-10 pm M-F 10-9 Sa-Su	2591128
hard disks, Digiview	Simon Tow	6-7 pm M-F	2888362
laser printing, desktop publishing	Frank Keighley	6-7 pm M-F	2396658
desktop video	Robert Vander Meer	6-8 pm M-F	2417113
beginners AmigaDOS	Colin Vance	6-8 pm M-Su	2511087
Superbase Wordperfect	Andrew Boundy	8-10pm M-Th	2916971
Modula-2	James Dempsey	7-10 pm M-F	2922145

# 'MEGA' PROWRITE REVIEW - ADDENDUM by Garry Brooke

This material was held over from the review of ProWrite 3.2 in the August beCAUS.

The following two listings are the startup files for operating ProWrite when using floppy drives. They require two drives but could be easily amended for a one drive machine. You will see that a few techniques have been used in an attempt to speed up processing. These include making commands resident or loading them into RAM and using the WAIT command. The main feature is that the dictionary and thesaurus can be loaded into RAM leaving the ProWrite system disk in DF0: and freeing DF1: for data disks. ProWrite automatically looks in RAM for the dictionary and thesaurus so there is no need for an as-sign statement.

## ProWrite 3.3 Upgrade

New Horizons has announced in the USA a new version (v3.3) of ProWrite. The following enhancements are included:

- v3.3 supports the Hotlinks dynamic data exchange developed by Soft-Logic Publishing - this gives you the ability to edit text in ProWrite and have it automatically incorporated into Pagestream
- text can now automatically wrap around pictures
- print preview
- improved font handling
- a very large number of new macro commands has been added
- ProWrite now supports new features of Kickstart 3.0 as well as allowing you to open up screens of up to 256 colours on Amigas with the new graphics chips

Upgrades should be shipping this month.

PROWRITE-SYSTEM:S/STARTUP-SEQUENCE

```
SetPatch >nil:
echo "Placing Fast RAM first"
System/FastMemFirst
wait 1
failat 11
wait 1
resident CLI L:Shell-seg SYSTEM
pure add
wait 1
mount newcon:
wait 1
run execute s:StartupII
wait >nil: 4 mins
path ram: add
echo " "
ask "Do you want the Dictionary in
RAM ? (y or n)"
if warn
if exists "ram:main dictionary"
echo " "
echo "Hey, the dictionary is already
there !"
else
echo " "
echo " Loading Dictionary into
RAM"
echo " "
echo " [this will take a little while]"
copy "Prowrite-Utilities:Main
Dictionary" to ram:
wait 1
endif
endif
echo " "
ask "Do you want the Thesaurus in
RAM ?"
if warn
if exists "ram:thesaurus"
echo " "
echo "Hey, the Thesaurus is already
there !"
else
echo " "
echo " Loading Thesaurus into
RAM"
echo " "
echo " [this will take a little while
too]"
copy Prowrite-Utilities:Thesaurus to
ram:
wait 1
```

```
endif
endif
wait 1
echo " "
echo "Loading WorkBench"
delete >nil: ram:???? ram:ask
ram:endif
LoadWB delay
EndCLI >NIL:
```

PROWRITE-SYSTEM:S/STARTUPII

```
resident c:resident
resident c:wait
resident c:echo
resident c:copy
wait 1
dir >nil: ram:
wait 1
echo " "
echo "Adding 15 buffers for each
drive"
Addbuffers df0: 15
wait 1
AddBuffers df1: 15
wait 1
SetClock load ;load system time from
real time clock
wait 1
echo " "
date
wait 1
echo " "
echo "Setting USA1 as keymap"
System/SetMap usa1
echo " "
echo "Loading Screen Blanker"
System/pyro
echo " "
echo "Invoking ARExx"
sys:ARExx-Stuff/RexxMast >nil:
resident echo remove
resident wait remove
copy c/wait ram:wait
copy c/echo ram:echo
copy c/if ram:
copy c/endif ram:
copy c/ask ram:ask
resident copy remove
c/resident resident remove
;
break 1 C
```

The second disk primarily contains the dictionary and thesaurus files. It has room for the 'Big' dictionary or you can use the smaller version leaving room for more utilities, test files etc.

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Mark Trenery 286 1358

# OpalVision - First Impressions

## Mark Trenery

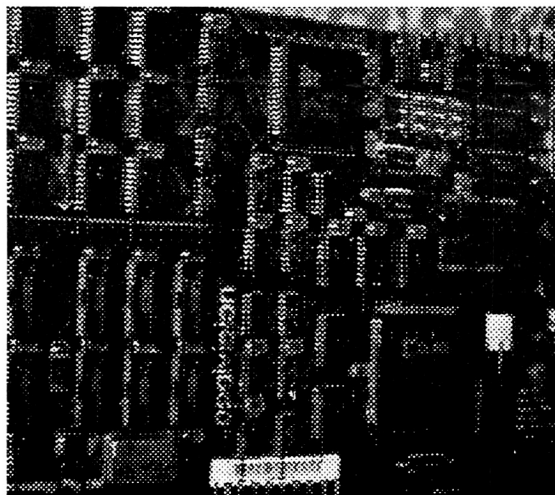
It's been a long time coming, but the much touted OpalVision 24-bit graphics and video system has been released to an eager Australian market - and equally eager world markets. OpalVision offers a hardware display card featuring a graphics paint package working in high resolution with millions of colours - around 16.77 million. (For an introduction to 24-bit graphics see an earlier article in CAUS June '91) There's also a presentation program, and various utility software for controlling the display settings of OpalVision.

A significant feature of the system is its expandability due to the modular design of the hardware and continuing software support. Not to mention the fact that this hardware is designed in Australia and proudly bears the Opal Tech Australia reference. Some CAUS members may recall an impressive demonstration back around November 1991, presented by the designer of OpalVision, Gary Rayner. This was the developing OpalVision's first days out in public. At that point it was planned to have a number of different boards for different markets; thankfully the whole lot has been rolled into one main board that provides a base to expand to a full-on video workstation.

After perusing for some time the colour glossies extolling the virtues of owning an OpalVision, the decision was made to purchase. Other hardware, namely DCTV was considered carefully, but if quality video is required for encoding to mid-to-high band formats such as S-VHS, HI-8, U-matic etc. then pure RGB output versus composite really is needed. As the Opal Vision box says, 'Uncompromised, 24-bit higher-than-broadcast-quality, crystal-clear images which far surpass any composite video or HAM system.' Well I've only a humble Commodore 1081 monitor, but 'ooh yeah', this description aptly describes

the display - brilliant!

After a short wait of a couple days the OpalVision was available for collection. From the very beginning the whole package impresses me. The slick packaging is eye-catching with a motion-blurred photo under the Opal stone-tiled (what else?) title. Inside the foam packed box are two manuals, seven disks, some other literature and the OpalVision card.



The card itself looks tidy, there's no last minute jumper wire connections or at least I didn't know I was looking at them. Everything is surface mounted except 12 small chips which I guess might be the 1.5 MB of RAM included. The modular concept is plain to see - there's three or four large pin connections for other component boards being released (frame-grabber, genlock, four input switcher, scan-rate converter etc.). These will plug into the main board. Also prominent at one end, is a large square socket for the video roaster chip. This thing along with the frame-grabber/genlock plug-in board allows for special effects on live video - the effects on television we see everyday and currently what the NTSC-only (for now anyway) Video Toaster board performs.

The OpalVision card installs into the video slot on Amiga 2000/3000 ma-

chines. The first of the two manuals, Installation and Intro are easy to follow. It covers installing the hardware and software and then steps through a very brief introduction to the OpalPaint software. The other, a reference manual to all software, details the commands and options. They're written in clear and concise english, make good use of white space on the page and are ring bound format (they lie flat on my desk!) so on first impressions the manuals have had some well spent time on them.

A minimum system required is 1 MB chip and 2 MB fast RAM with a Hard drive being 'strongly' recommended. The introduction manuals tables a recommended solution with 2 MB chip, > 4MB fast RAM, > 40 MB HD, 68020 or better processor, maths co-processor, WB2.x and a Wacom graphics tablet. The other Amiga around this place would be a more comfortable system for an OpalVision environment - 25 Mhz '030, 7 MB RAM - but for now it's driven by the '020 system belonging to the main financier of this purchase. Despite this, my simple tinkering with OpalPaint shows it to be eminently usable under the '020, with perhaps the filled drawing tools lacking some oomph.

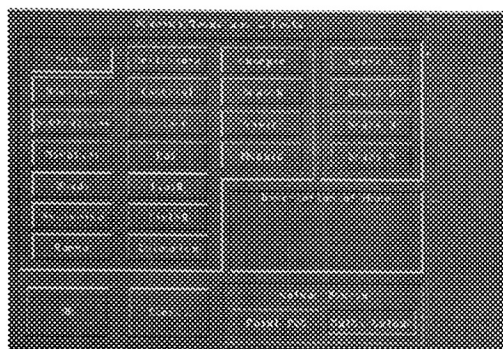
### OpalPaint Software

Well having only had this system for two days I can't attempt to do justice to the software, and so I can only really describe it rather than review. It's pretty nice. Want more? Well the basic layout features a control bar along the bottom of the screen much like the vertical control bar of DeluxePaint. There are no pull-down menus to get lost in, pop-up requesters serve the purpose instead. For all Dpaint users - most of the functions of OpalPaint use the same keyboard short-cuts as DPaint. The main drawing tools are similar - continuous and dotted free-



hand, eclipse, rectangle, curve, magnify, straight line etc. Pretty standard so far, the real power comes with the painting modes which include colorize, additive, subtractive, shade, sharpen, negative, mosaic, tint the list goes on.

I spent the first few hours simply using cut-out brushes to replace heads of people and the smooth mode to make it look 'normal'. With 24-bit colour the smoothness and blending of shades is infinite, and no work is required for the edits to look convincing - just smooth away with the mouse. Further to these modes are extra loadable modes, four can be available at any one time, the rest - a requester away. The modes are C compiled programs and the file specifications have been released into the public domain. The manual states that additional modes are available on public domain disks, another indication of just how expandable the system is.



Drawing Modes



Of interest to video users would be the rub-through and transparency gradients. Using one of three work modes (the Alpha Transparency mode - the other two being Paint and Stencil) a mask can be used to paint over a 24-bit image with 256 levels of grey. The darker the grey the more transparent; black indicating fully see-through. With the genlock-framegrabber module, live video would be the view through the image.

## So many colours, so much to do

First thoughts about moving up to 24-bit colour might be the overwhelming nature of the medium - just how does one control the hues, RGB sliders, value and saturation? These queries are attended to well in the Introductory manual. The relations between each of the above are explained well and a method for colour selection is outlined for the new user. Of course, the system of RGB and HSV sliders is identical to those used by most Amiga graphic software, there's just many more shades from which to choose.

## File formats

OpalPaint loads and saves all normal IFF files, IFF-24, JPEG and its own format, OV\_FAST. As 24-bit becomes more entrenched in Amiga graphic work so will JPEG - an image compression standard. Just consider this, an image in OV\_FAST = 1,762 kb, in IFF-24 = 1,141 kb, JPEG = 78 kb.

There is a price to pay for the space savings - it takes time to decompress the image and depending on the level of compression, some loss of quality might be evident. However, JPEG can typically achieve a ten fold compression rate with no visible loss in quality. When the installation sequence said that the demo pics would require either 28 or 40 MB of my HD I jumped for JPEG, which only needed 2 MB.

On our 5 MB, 14.3 Mhz '020 machine the first images that I loaded with the included show program took some time to appear. I sat looking at the Workbench screen wondering what was going on, selected the viewer and image a second and third time and following that, the system fell over. 'Bug ridden, pre-release software' I thought, but later discovered that this is not the case. It merely was the time needed to decompress a JPEG file - around a minute or so. Though, trying to repeatedly run the Show24 program before

the first image is displayed does crash the system. The proper method is to use extended selection in WB or supply multiple file names in the one command from the command line.

The one thing always in short supply is chip ram. I would say 2 MB is highly desirable and indeed Amigas with anything less are described in the documentation as having "limited CHIP ram, as on most A2000s". The upshot of this is that the main title command bar in OpalPaint may be positioned a little higher on the page, leaving somewhere between two thirds to three quarters of the screen free for painting. I found that sometimes the area available for editing looked more like an NSTC screen and thought it was a bug in the software. The remaining portion of the image can still be edited by shifting the view around the image with the cursor keys, working on the visible part each time. A full view of the image can be called up with <amiga + v> at any time, regardless of previous activity this always fills the entire screen. It seems that sometimes there's more screen to use than others, so I presume this directly relates to the amount of CHIP ram available to OpalPaint.

The only 'bug' I can see at this stage is a hot-key short cut that is incorrectly labeled on screen. The 'scale image' function reduces the current image to fit on one page so all can be seen. The short-cut on the OpalPaint screen shows <amiga + s> which is in fact the keys to invoke the save requester. The manual correctly points out that it is "S" instead. Not really a bug just an oversight. I should mention that most software included with OpalVision is at version 1.0 and new releases are planned for regular updating.

Some of the other software includes Opal Presents, and King of Karate, the first 24-bit colour game, backdrop24, convert24, and show24. Opal Presents allows for the sequencing of images for display using wipe effects and fades. I've yet to explore this software



but have a great interest in combining its display with software such as Broadcast Titler 2. An important facility of OpalVision is its multi-level stencil and priority display - meaning that OpalVision graphics can be freely mixed in front of and behind normal Amiga graphics. For a good explanation of what this can do for you have look at the inside back cover of AmigaWorld (July 92) which details another 24-bit display device offering similar features. A nice utility, backdrop24, loads a 24-bit image into colour zero - the Workbench background. This also works with DeluxePaint IV so that animations can now have a beautiful backdrop with little or no Amiga system memory or processor overhead - the image is loaded to and displayed from the OpalVision 24-bit buffer. I guess if priority stencils were applied then some of the Amiga graphics drawn in Dpaint would disappear behind the 24-bit image and in others they would appear on top. There's Opal Hotkey to control such things as Opal priority stencil, Opal-Amiga-live video mixing and enabling Alpha channel transparency. This works at any time through keyboard presses and has a pop-up requester as well so that things can set with the mouse.

### Compatibility

The Opalvision graphics are outstanding to view and play with, but to put them down on video tape the RGB video needs to be encoded to composite or Y-C video. I use an Electronic Design Y-C/composite genlock for the job which encodes the Opalvision output perfectly. Opal Tech claim the Opalvision to be compatible with external genlocks, I can vouch for its suitability with the Electronic Design genlock. If you're not in a hurry though, the combined framegrabber/genlock offers some neat functions.

Opal Tech refer to the Wacom drawing tablet in their documentation but fail to mention any others. The Easy1 2000 drawing tablet that we use works fine along with OpalPaint. The Easy1 is a pressure sensitive drawing pad, so that any a pencil and paper can be used. Templates can be made up to sit over the drawing tools area, so each tool can accessed without going back to the mouse. Just run the required driver

before running OpalPaint and you're all set. With Easy1 there's the added bonus of having the two mouse buttons emulated by a red and white button on the drawing board. This allows for the settings requesters to be accessed, these are part of some drawing tools such as brush cutouts. Normally the right mouse button brings these up or as with the Wacom drawing tablet, a double press with the drawing instrument.

### So...

OpalVision is here to integrate well into an established system. It offers plenty of scope for expansion, looks to be well supported and works immediately with a swag of 24-bit software. I've rendered some pretty landscapes with Vista, viewed Imagine renderings and seen beautiful colour spreads created with Art Department Pro. Thanks to standard file format support and ease of use the system is, well usable. ASDG., the maker of AdPro, should next add direct support of OpalVision from within their image manipulation software. This would mean that any image created in or modified with the software could be sent straight to OpalVision for display, without the need to first save and load it. The planned release of genlock/framegrabber, live video effects, and scan-rate converters places the OpalVision well in the professional arena. Already in Sydney, a BBS has an OpalVision section for OpalVision owners to download software upgrades and discuss hints and tips for using OpalPaint etc. Mention is made of a Professional OpalPaint that will offer animation and perspective modes.

From all fronts the OpalVision main board looks to have a rosy future.

## For Sale

**AdSpeed** 14 Mhz direct 68000 chip replacement, suitable for all Amigas \$220

**2 MEG Proton Board** auto-config suit A1000 \$350

**Star NX1000** colour dot matrix printer, ribbons etc \$220

Phone David 291 8324

## What's Happening?

### Discounts

CAUS is pleased to advise members that Harvey Norman, Woden Plaza, is offering a concession to CAUS members on purchases of software and hardware. The concession is available on production of a valid current membership card. The amount of the concession is dependent on the item or items being purchased.

Members should also note that Grace Brothers in Civic is no longer giving a discount to CAUS members.

### Notice of Motion

A motion that the Committee be allowed to spend to a maximum of \$200 towards a Christmas function for CAUS members. The motion will be discussed at the October meeting and voted on at the November meeting. Details of the location and expected costs to members will be advised at the November meeting.

### Constitution Sub-Committee

We need two new members for this very important Sub-Committee to help draft the new CAUS Constitution which has to be in place by March 1993. If you are of a legal bent or just wish to help, please ring Secretary Tony Hayman on 296 1894.

### Upcoming Meetings

At the October meeting, the beginners' group will be discussing general jargon and viruses (a greatly misunderstood subject!) and the main part of the meeting will involve demonstrations by the Genealogy and Graphics SIGs.

The November meeting will start with a general HELP session for beginners (and anyone else) with an "expert" panel to answer your questions. So, bring your problems, Guru message numbers or software that doesn't seem to work and see if we can find the solutions. This session will go on for as long as there are questions.